UNESCO's Use of Moral Relativism to Foster Anti-Israel Bias

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Arguments making use of “moral relativism,” or the immoral claim that “the truth or justification of moral judgments is not absolute, but relative to the moral standard of some person or group of persons”[[1]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1) are often used against Israel in a damaging way. The United Nations is a major culprit, and this tool is employed frequently under its auspices

In an earlier article we have shown moral relativism’s regular use by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).[[2]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn2) This abusive instrument, based on “different value criteria for different people”, is regularly employed against Israel by yet another UN agency - the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

UNESCO was established in 1945, its purpose being “to respond to the firm belief of nations, forged by two world wars in less than a generation, that political and economic agreements are not enough to build a lasting peace. Peace must be established on the basis of humanity’s moral and intellectual solidarity.”[[3]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn3)

Israel has been an active and compliant member of UNESCO since 1999. It now has nine World Heritage Sites and eighteen tentative sites awaiting approval.[[4]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn4) Yet UNESCO has continually attacked Israel. The accusations by the agency not only concern what it falsely calls Israeli threats to cultural landmarks, but also question Jewish claims to heritage in Israel.

In 2012, UNESCO inaugurated a sponsored Chair in Astronomy, Astrophysics and Space Sciences at the Islamic University of Gaza. The institution employs numerous Hamas engineers who have been known to manufacture explosives and bombs for use against Israeli civilians. According to a senior Israeli Foreign Ministry official, this sponsoring of academic activities taking place within a terrorist environment was announced without being preceded by an investigation of the university’s doings. Similar inaugurations of UNESCO-sponsored chairs at the Technion and at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliyah (IDC) were, however, “checked with a magnifying glass.”[[5]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn5)

One common application of moral relativism by UNESCO has been its harsh judgment of how Israel manages holy sites. The agency has also denied the legitimacy of Jewish claims to these sites. No similar standards have been applied by UNESCO within the Arab world.

In 2014, UNESCO partnered with the Simon Wiesenthal Center in presenting an exhibition at UNESCO’s Paris headquarters entitled, “People, Book, Land – The 3,500 Year Relationship of the Jewish People to the Holy Land.” Its text was written by the late Robert Wistrich, a leading scholar of anti-Semitism.

The opening of the exhibit, which had been set for January 2014, was postponed by UNESCO because of pressure from the 22 UN member states which form the Arab bloc. They invented an absurd and laughable argument- of professing the “concern that the planned exhibition could impact negatively on the peace process and current negotiations underway in the Middle East.”[[6]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn6)

Perhaps to avoid direct confrontation regarding its anti-Israelism, the official UNESCO statement announcing the postponement of the exhibit discussed various Holocaust education and Yiddish preservation activities held by its sponsors. It made no mention of any other past, current, or future activities involving Israel.[[7]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn7) The exhibit finally opened in June 2014, in part because of protests by the US, Israeli, French, and Canadian governments.[[8]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn8)

In May 2015, the prospects of peace apparently remained unharmed when UNESCO’s Palestinian branch hosted a workshop to draft the “Palestinian Law on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.”[[9]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn9)

UNESCO also employed harsh standards in its condemnation of Israel, released in July 2015. It claimed that Israel was damaging the Temple Mount with “illegal excavations.” It also called the Western Wall Plaza the “Buraq Plaza”.[[10]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn10) The truth is that the Waqf, the Muslim authority in charge of the Temple Mount, has been damaging this site for decades with poorly-planned archaeological explorations and attempts to remove any evidence of Jewish heritage from the site. There has been no UNESCO condemnation of this ongoing destruction of antiquities.[[11]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn11)

The same UNESCO statement claimed that the construction of the Jerusalem light rail was destroying the “visual integrity of the Old City.”[[12]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn12) This was nonsense as the light rail does not run in the Old City.

The destruction of the ancient city of Nimrud in March 2015 by the Islamic State movement was one of the most prominent acts against world cultural heritage in recent years. UNESCO condemned the event in a statement released by its Director-General Irina Bokova. She declared, “I appeal also to all cultural institutions, museums, journalists, professors, and scientists to share and explain the importance of this heritage and the Mesopotamian civilization…At stake is the survival of the Iraqi culture and society.”[[13]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn13)

The Nimrud issue seems to indicate that according to UNESCO, artifacts and archeology of ancient peoples and of religions other than Islam are of great importance and must be protected. In its statement on holy sites in Jerusalem, however, UNESCO does not refer to the importance of the Old City to Judaism and Christianity.[[14]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17410#_ftn14) It claims that the activities supposedly taking place are a threat to Islam.

UNESCO differs from the UN General Assembly or UNHRC in that it operates as an independent organization. As such, its actions cannot be dictated by the dominant Arab vote. Yet, UNESCO has consistently heeded the claims of the Arab world. It operates in contradiction to its founding principles of moral and intellectual solidarity and of collaboration among nations. It does not support the protection of non-Muslim cultural heritage within Israel, even though the country is the Middle East’s only democracy and UNESCO’s willing partner. Instead, the agency uses Israel as a pawn to appease the Arab world.

UNESCO does not only apply double standards toward Israel, it makes the conscious choice of giving precedence to terrorists and denies the inalienable rights of the Jewish people to its homeland.

**Sources:**

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